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## WILDLIFE SERVICES—SOUTH DAKOTA

### Contact Information:

#### For Assistance:

*Phil Mastrangelo, South Dakota Wildlife Services State  
Director or Tim Pugh, South Dakota Wildlife Services  
District Supervisor*

*420 S. Garfield Avenue, Suite 300, Pierre, SD 57501*

*Phone: (605) 224-8692 FAX: (605) 945-2677*

*Toll Free Number: 1-866-4USDAWS 1-866-487-3297*

*E-mail: [p.mastrangelo@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:p.mastrangelo@aphis.usda.gov) or  
[timothy.l.pugh@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:timothy.l.pugh@aphis.usda.gov)*

#### For Research:

*Dr. George Linz, Field Station Leader  
2110 Miriam Circle, Suite B*

*Bismarck, ND 58501-2502*

*Phone: (701) 250-4467*

*FAX: (701) 250-4408*

*E-mail: [george.m.linz@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:george.m.linz@aphis.usda.gov)*

*Web site: [www.aphis.usda.gov/ws](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws)*

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in South Dakota

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on South Dakota Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

South Dakota is characterized by a diverse landscape of river valleys, rolling prairie, and badlands. Vast open spaces occupied by farms, ranches, and small towns contrast with expanding urban and suburban areas. A diversity of wildlife occupies both rural and urban areas, often causing conflicts with their human counterparts.

WS assists with the management of wildlife conflicts that impact livestock producers, farmers, homeowners, airports, and public land managers.



### Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

While South Dakota WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities, a few in-depth examples are provided to highlight the program's role in protecting important resources such as livestock, crops, public health and safety, and private and publicly-owned property.

**Protecting Crops**—Blackbirds are responsible for more than \$5 million in losses annually to sunflower and grain crops in the upper Great Plains. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) operates a field station in Bismarck, ND, that continues to work on the development of control tools that can be used to mitigate these losses. On an annual basis, WS identifies up to 800 acres of cattail wetlands in South Dakota that are being used by roosting blackbirds. These areas are treated with an aquatic herbicide to reduce the cattail coverage to 30 percent. These treatments make the wetlands

#### Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting sunflower and other grain crops from damage by blackbirds
- Protecting public health and safety at airports

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to South Dakota:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating chemical repellents for reducing blackbird damage to sunflowers
- Evaluating population dynamics and the dispersal patterns of blackbirds responsible for sunflower damage
- Evaluating population turnover and the dispersal of wintering blackbird roosts into sunflower growing areas
- Evaluating avian use of harvested sunflower fields

less attractive to blackbirds while providing better habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.

**Protecting Natural Resources**—Considered the most endangered species in North America, the black-footed ferret is being successfully reintroduced into areas of South Dakota. WS initially provided assistance to protect newly released ferrets from predators, and WS specialists continue to assist in recovery efforts.

**Protecting Air Travelers**—Every year, lives are endangered and millions of dollars are wasted when birds and other wildlife damage aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million annually.

WS is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. NWRC's field station in Sandusky, OH continues to conduct research to better understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards. Studies are underway at several large airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species of greatest concern to aviation.

To gain a better understanding of actual or potential wildlife hazards, WS recently completed one-year wildlife hazard assessments at the Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Pierre, and Watertown airports in South Dakota. WS is currently developing wildlife hazard management plans for each of these airports based on the findings of the one-year assessments.

**Information Transfer**—Commercial pesticide applicators who work with predator, rodent, and bird problems in South Dakota are trained by WS in wildlife identification and the proper use of pesticides and other management tools. In addition to regular communication with sunflower producers, WS provides information about blackbird damage and assistance through several annual meetings, workshops, and field days.



Looking to the Future

Public health and safety is a growing concern for the South Dakota WS program, particularly at airports. Although WS has conducted assessments of wildlife hazards at several civilian airports, more systematic and thorough evaluations must be completed at all civilian and military airports in South Dakota.

South Dakota Wildlife Services Funding .....

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

